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1 – New cancer-causing danger in Baton Rouge-New Orleans corridor, EPA report says, Baton Rouge Advocate, 9/29/18

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_7da74512-c376-11e8-a2f0-bfcdeb36764f.html

Yet again, researchers are finding that communities along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans are at a greater risk for exposure to cancer-causing chemicals.

2 - Haze Rules, Market Pressures Could Spell End For Arkansas Coal-Fired Plants, KUAR, 9/28/18

<http://www.ualrpublicradio.org/post/haze-rules-market-pressures-could-spell-end-arkansas-coal-fired-plants>

Under the Environmental Protection Agency's Regional Haze Rule, states that didn't meet air quality and visibility goals risked triggering federal controls. But now, the EPA is steadily giving control back into the hands of states.

3 - Navajo commission hears report from feds about abandoned uranium mines, Santa Fe New Mexican, 9/28/18

http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/navajo-commission-hears-report-from-feds-about-abandoned-uranium-mines/article_5d0f5bed-5cd7-59e4-956e-76dcdbd7ade91.html

Work continues across the Navajo Nation to study and reach conclusions about the impact of uranium mining and processing on tribal land.

4 – Texas oil companies pump more than \$17 million into fighting Washington carbon tax, Houston Chronicle, 10/1/18

<https://www.chron.com/business/article/Texas-oil-companies-pump-more-than-17-million-13267260.php>

Texas oil companies have pumped more than \$17 million into a campaign opposing a carbon tax in Washington state. The refiners Phillips 66 of Houston and Andeavor of San Antonio, and the U.S. subsidiary of the British oil major BP have poured more than \$17 million into "No on 1631" campaign, which seeks to defeat the carbon tax initiative in the Nov. 6 election.

5 - Environmental groups sue EPA to void approval of Oklahoma's coal waste program, NPR StateImpact, 9/28/18

<https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2018/09/28/environmental-groups-sue-epa-to-void-approval-of-oklahomas-coal-waste-program/>

Three environmental groups filed a federal lawsuit this week that accuses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of unlawfully approving Oklahoma's plan to manage waste from coal-fired power plants.

6 – Residents weigh in on state environmental regulators' waters proposal, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 9/30/18

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2018/sep/30/residents-weigh-in-on-waters-proposal-2/>

State environmental regulators' draft list of impaired-water bodies doesn't provide justification for not listing certain waters and won't protect certain waters from continued pollution, dozens of people wrote to regulators this month.

7 – How do you (and chicken litter) affect the environment? A trip to Spring Creek gave students a real-life look, Tulsa World, 9/29/18

https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/local/how-do-you-and-chicken-litter-affect-the-environment-a/article_0fcfded1-4c24-5bbe-a75d-22e00d6168ff.html

Students from schools in the center of counties where chicken farming is a growing concern had a closer look at their local clear-water stream this week, and Oklahoma Conservation Commission Blue Thumb Education Program staff and volunteers incorporated balance into those lessons—literally.

8 – New Mexico Environment Department Awards APS Grant Funding For Early Replacement Of Five Buses, Los Alamos (NM) Daily Post, 9/29/18

<https://www.ladailypost.com/content/new-mexico-environment-department-awards-aps-grant-funding-early-replacement-five-buses>

The Albuquerque Public School District has been awarded \$380,626.00 in grant funding from the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA).

9 - Helena-West Helena receives \$3.5M loan, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 10/1/18

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2018/oct/01/helena-west-helena-receives-3-5m-loan-o/>

The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission this month approved about \$4 million in loans, about \$1.4 million in loans to be immediately forgiven and about \$285,000 in grants to water and wastewater utilities in Arkansas.

10 - Meteorite, Satan ruled out, but fire in hole remains mystery for Arkansas town, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 10/1/18

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2018/oct/01/fire-in-hole-a-midway-mystery-20181001-1/>

Meteorites, methane and the devil have been ruled out as the cause of a flaming hole in the ground at Midway. Mickey Pendergrass, the county judge in Baxter County, said officials are still investigating the mysterious Midway hole that flared into a spectacular 12-foot flame early on the morning of Sept. 17, then burned at about 8 feet high for more than 40 minutes.

11 - EPA does the science shuffle, Politico, 9/28/18

<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/morning-energy/2018/09/28/epa-does-the-science-shuffle-355213>

EPA leaders floated a reorganization plan to staff this week that would merge the agency's science adviser with another unit under the Office of Research and Development — a move that drew alarm from some agency staffers and outside observers who called it a major demotion for the position.

12 - Trump administration sees 7-degree rise in global temperatures by 2100, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 9/28/18

https://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2018/09/trump_administration_sees_7-de.html#incart_river_index

Last month, deep in a 500-page environmental impact statement, the Trump administration made a startling assumption: On its current course, the planet will warm a disastrous 7 degrees by the end of this century.

13 – Preparing for unprecedented storms, Chemical Engineering, 10/1/18

<https://www.chemengonline.com/preparing-unprecedented-storms/?printmode=1>

This year, hurricane season in the U.S. has been active again, with Hurricane Florence battering North Carolina and its surroundings last month. While wind speeds labeled it as a Category 1 hurricane at landfall, the enormous, slow-moving storm caused great damage, and tragically, loss of life.

New cancer-causing danger in Baton Rouge-New Orleans corridor, EPA report says

By STEVE HARDY, DELLA HASSELLE and NICK REIMANN | Advocate staff writers **SEP 29, 2018 - 5:00 PM**

Yet again, researchers are finding that communities along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans are at a greater risk for exposure to cancer-causing chemicals.

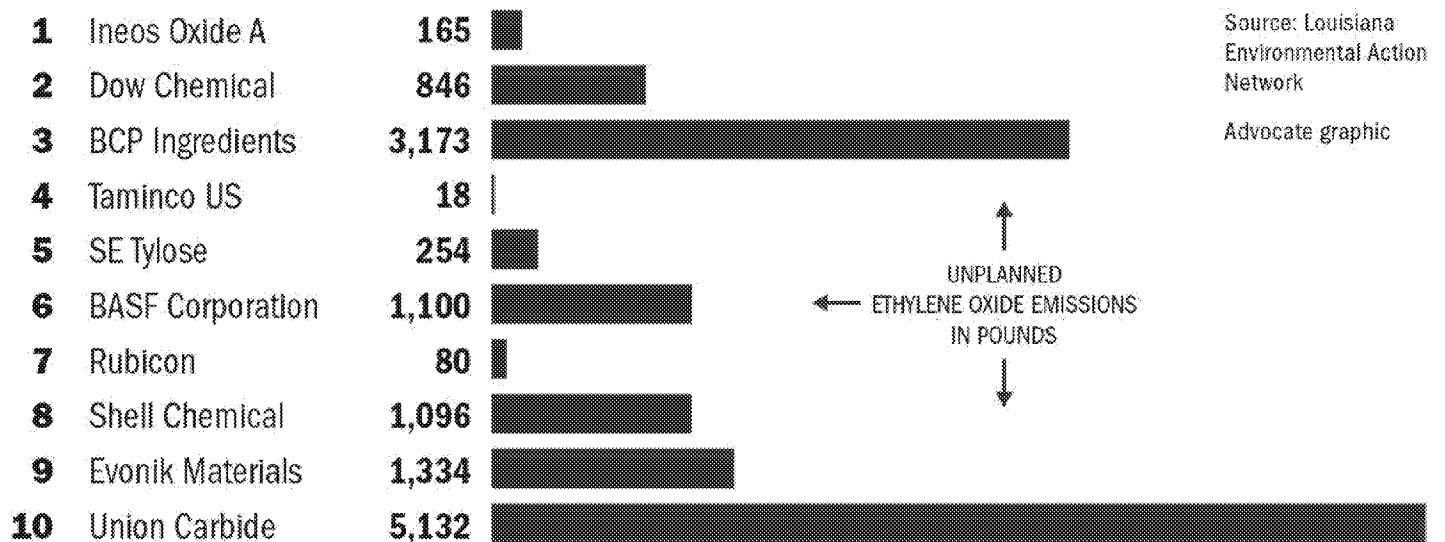
Three years ago, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency declared that St. John the Baptist Parish had the highest cancer risk from airborne pollutants nationwide because of the "likely carcinogen" chloroprene.

Now, the most recent National Air Toxics Assessment conducted by the EPA notes dangers from ethylene oxide. Some areas on the east side of the Mississippi River, around St. Gabriel and Geismar, are at more than twice the risk for certain cancers as their neighbors on the west side, where there are fewer petrochemical facilities. The numbers are even more staggering downstream.

Story Continued Below

Ethylene oxide — a chemical the EPA says is a proven carcinogen to humans — is produced throughout the United States but in disproportionately high amounts in St. Charles Parish, where scientists say residents in one census tract face the highest risk in the country of developing lymphoid or breast cancers from it.

Ten facilities in the corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans reported emissions of “known carcinogen” ethylene oxide in 2016. Unplanned missions in pounds, by facility:



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Reginald Grace let out a long, low sigh when told of the newest EPA findings.

“That’s horrible. You’re fighting a giant,” said Grace, a leader of the Committee for a Better St. Gabriel.

Ethylene oxide is believed to contribute a 200 in a million chance of cancer development around St. Gabriel — twice the EPA’s acceptable upper limit. In less industrial areas, whether across the river or farther north, like in downtown Baton Rouge, the rate is closer to 70 in a million.

“I’m very concerned. We have a lot of people in our community who depend on the chemical industry for jobs and are afraid to speak up, but I’m not,” Grace said.

He recalled the persimmon trees, berry bushes and fishing spots around his home growing up, but now “all of that has subsided. ... Everything is polluted. Chemicals have taken over.”

In Ascension Parish, the BASF facility in Geismar released 1,100 pounds of ethylene oxide in 2016, according to the EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory.

Travis Turner represents the area in the Ascension Parish Council. He had not yet seen the recent NATA report but said he would be willing to talk about additional regulations if a plant in his district was having an adverse effect on residents’ health.

“It’s definitely concerning if what they’re releasing is causing cancer,” Turner said.

BASF staff said their emissions number is misleading, and the site does not pose a risk to the public.

The Geismar plant has thousands of unwelded gas line connections at valves, flanges and screwed connections. Crews check those sites weekly to annually as required by regulation, but monitoring equipment is not sensitive enough to detect the smallest amount of escaped ethylene oxide, so the facility reports the minimum detectable amount, which adds up across the thousands of connections, said environmental health and safety director Dave Mihalik.

The campus had a release in early 2017 when a seal failed, and 40 to 50 pounds of ethylene oxide escape. But overall, Mihalik said, he feels safe working at the plant. Workers occasionally clip monitoring equipment to their uniforms to make sure they’re protected under regulations set forth by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The public at large also doesn’t need to worry, in part because BASF owns so much land around the Geismar site, staff said.

“If you did fence line (monitoring), you would not pick it up,” Mihalik said.

BASF uses ethylene oxide as an ingredient in a number of products, such as soap, shampoo and laundry detergent. It is consumed during manufacture and not present in the finished products, Mihalik said.

A spokeswoman with Dow Chemical Co., which owns Union Carbide, acknowledged that the company is one of the largest producers of ethylene oxide in the country but says it has “safely produced” it in St. Charles Parish since Dow took ownership of the plant in 2001.

“Dow is compliant with the current EPA regulations,” said Ashley Mendoza, the company’s public affairs manager. “We have always operated within our permitted emission standards.”

While the plant has long met those industry standards, scientists’ understanding of the dangers associated with the chemical has changed over time, according to the EPA. It was only in 2016 that the chemical was categorized as a carcinogen.

The change in classification brings greater demand for tighter regulation that could bring down acceptable emission levels. Agency scientists say they will now review the Clean Air Act and “evaluate opportunities” to reduce the emissions nationwide.

The EPA will also determine whether more immediate emission reduction strategies are necessary in local areas, scientists said in a release. Based on the data, those areas could include St. Charles and St. John.

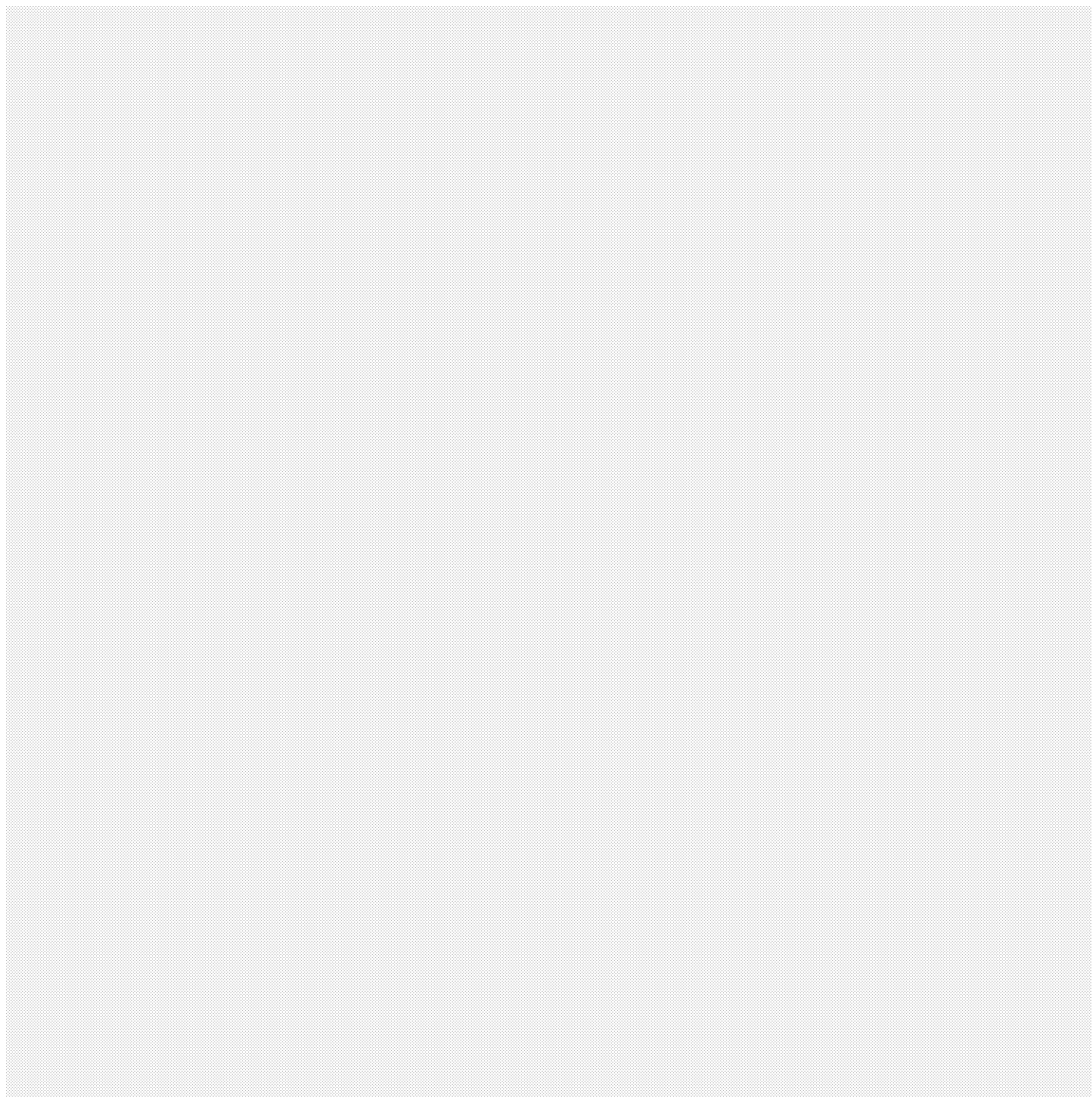
To do so, however, the EPA will have to develop new monitoring techniques because current methods, including traditional air quality monitoring, aren’t sensitive enough, according to the agency.

“Facility emissions testing, combined with air-quality modeling, can provide a more complete picture of ethylene oxide in the air ... than air-quality monitoring can currently provide,” EPA scientists said.

In the meantime, residents in St. John worry that they’re facing a double whammy of dangerous chemical exposures.

Union Carbide is just downriver from Denka Performance Elastomer in LaPlace. Denka is the only plant producing chloroprene in the country and the focus of the previous air toxins report released in 2015.

"I just feel like I want to vomit. I feel like I want to cry," said a tearful Cindy Russo, who lives in LaPlace. "I just feel so helpless. And you know, these two chemicals we're talking about — that's just two. There's hundreds of other chemicals being manufactured out there."



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At a recent meeting of the activist group Concerned Citizens of St. John, Wilma Subra, an environmental scientist with the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, called ethylene oxide "much more toxic" than chloroprene.

Chloroprene is categorized as a "likely carcinogen," according to the EPA, whereas the classification for ethylene oxide was changed to "carcinogenic to humans" two years ago.

And while exposure to chloroprene can result in symptoms like breathing ailments, skin conditions and rapid heartbeat, Subra says limited evidence shows ethylene oxide could cause spontaneous abortions, damage to developing fetuses and harm to the brain and nervous system.

As she presented a 23-page report on the chemical, many audience members gasped. Some even wiped away tears.

"I'm scared to breathe," said Tish Taylor, a member of the group.

Mustard gas and other uses

Ethylene oxide, which appears in gas and liquid form, has been around since 1859, when it was first prepared by a French chemist named Charles-Adolphe Wurst.

During World War I, it was used as a precursor to make the chemical weapon mustard gas. Production was altered in 1931 by French chemist Theodore Lefort, who figured out how to make it directly from ethylene by using silver as a catalyst.

The chemical is now used primarily as an intermediate, meaning it is used to make other chemicals, and as a sterilizing agent for medical equipment. It's also used as a fumigating agent for spices.

As a gas, the chemical has the odor of ether — a slightly sweet smell, according to scientists.

The EPA officially deemed the chemical to be a carcinogen in a report issued December 2016, but had said in draft reviews as early as 2014 that the chemical could cause cancer to those exposed by breathing it in over a long term.

Scientists with the agency found the chemical to be carcinogenic to laboratory animals, inducing tumors in the lymphatic system, brain, lung, uterus and mammary gland, according to a 2014 assessment.

The agency also said there was evidence that it was dangerous to humans, and caused lymphoid and breast cancers to exposed workers.

Based on the studies and evidence, the EPA determined that over a lifetime — measured as 70 years — a person could contract those cancers if they were exposed to 0.003 micrograms per cubic meter constantly, every day.

By comparison, chloroprene is considered risky at a constant exposure of 0.2 micrograms per cubic meter, the EPA has said.

At risk in the River Parishes

As of 2016, there were 118 industrial facilities releasing ethylene oxide in the U.S., according to the NATA report, which was released this year but uses emissions data from 2014.

Thirteen of those facilities are located in Louisiana.

In one census tract in St. Charles Parish — just across the river from the Union Carbide plant — constant exposure to the emissions would result in an estimated 710 people out of a million contracting cancer. That's a jaw-dropping figure, considering the upper limits of what national regulators deem acceptable is 100 people in a million. The national average is just 1.3 people in a million.

In 2016, Union Carbide deliberately released an estimated 30,700 pounds of ethylene oxide, and an estimated 5,100 unplanned pounds of the produced gas also escaped into the air, according to an EPA database. The only U.S. industrial facility releasing more ethylene oxide into the air is located in Port Neches, Texas, according to a separate EPA database.

In St. John, a chemical company called the Evonik Materials Corp. also added to the area's emissions of the carcinogen. Data collected from the EPA shows it released about 1,300 pounds into the air in 2016. Closer to Baton Rouge, BCP Ingredients near St. Gabriel released 3,173 pounds.

The fact that the EPA hasn't yet begun monitoring the air quality or the chemical emissions coming from the plants came as a surprise for some River Parishes residents who have been closely tracking the EPA's air quality data on chloroprene for more than a year now.

But Subra said that ethylene oxide isn't one of the chemicals the EPA is testing for right now, in part because the chemical was so recently categorized as a carcinogen, and in part because the equipment in place now isn't sensitive enough to measure for it.

"You can't just do a canister test for it," Subra said, underscoring that because such tiny amounts are thought to cause health risks, it has to be measured in thousandths of a microgram per cubic meter.

The EPA has estimated cancer risk, however, based on how much of the chemical the plants put out each year. The science isn't perfect, as estimates based on production are different from measuring how much of the chemical actually escapes from the facility into the air, and also how much of it sticks around in communities after wind and other environmental factors come into play.

Local government officials said little when shown the results, with a spokeswoman for the St. Charles Parish administration, Adrienne Bourgeois, saying that "it would be inappropriate to comment on this matter at this time." Baileigh Rebowe, a spokeswoman for the St. John administration, did not return a call seeking comment.

Gregory Langley, a spokesman with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, said that the department is aware of the NATA report and plans to meet with facilities producing ethylene oxide to discuss "possible emissions reductions options," but that there is "no timetable for reductions or monitoring at present."

He also underscored that the LSU Tumor Registry shows no increased incidence of cancers associated with ethylene oxide in St. Charles or St. John parishes.

Moreover, Langley said that industry would be challenging the science behind the NATA report. The industry's trade association, the American Chemical Council, will be filing a "request for correction," he said, asking the EPA to withdraw the data behind the study.

Chuck Brown, the DEQ secretary, has challenged previous EPA recommendations.

When the latest NATA study showed St. John had the highest risk of cancer from airborne pollutants due to chloroprene, Brown told Parish Council members and residents that there was "no smoking gun," and that the health-based exposure limit the EPA suggested for emissions was not "enforceable."

Haze Rules, Market Pressures Could Spell End For Arkansas Coal-Fired Plants

By DANIEL BREEN · SEP 28, 2018

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The entrance to Entergy Arkansas's White Bluff coal-fired power plant near Redfield, Ark.

DANIEL BREEN / ARKANSAS PUBLIC MEDIA

Originally published on September 28, 2018 5:40 p



Listen to the report here.

Under the Environmental Protection Agency's Regional Haze Rule, states that didn't meet air quality and visibility goals risked triggering federal controls. But now, the EPA is steadily giving control back into the hands of states.

Arkansas's plan, which is awaiting final approval, calls for one of its largest coal-fired plants, the White Bluff plant in Redfield, to stop burning coal within the next

"Coal used to be a bigger part of our portfolio, but now it's a smaller part of our portfolio, and it's all driven by economics," said Kurt Castleberry, director of resource planning and market operations at Entergy Arkansas.

Environmental Regulations aside, Castleberry says it serves electric utilities' bottom line to stop burning coal.

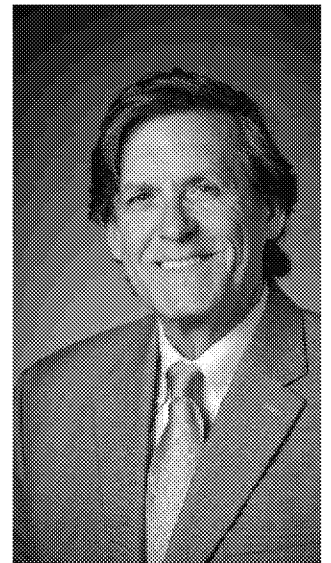
"Natural gas is really cheap right now because there's a big supply, and we expect that supply to be there for a long time."

Entergy's usage of White Bluff and its Independence plant in northeast Arkansas dropped in 2015 as natural gas prices steadily declined, according to a spokeswoman.

Castleberry says about 10 percent of Entergy Arkansas's total power production comes from its two coal-fired plants. About two-thirds, he says, comes from Arkansas Nuclear One near Russellville.

Arkansas has four coal-fired plants in total, but Entergy Arkansas owns the largest stake in the two biggest producers. Its Independence plant, along with White Bluff, have a capacity of over 3,000 megawatts combined.

The federal haze plan, which is currently being replaced by the state plan, called for federally-owned lands like national parks to have normal visibility conditions by 2064. That meant cutting down on the most common causes of haze, emissions of nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide from coal plants.



Kurt Castleberry, director of resource planning and market operations at Entergy Arkansas.

CREDIT: DAVID LEWIS / ENTERGY ARKANSAS

The federal plan mandated installing "scrubbers" that control sulfur dioxide emissions at both White Bluff and Independence. But the new state plan doesn't require scrubbers at either plant. Castleberry says that would have cost billions of dollars, and could have impacted Arkansas's third-in-the-nation cheapest energy prices.

"Absent that, we'd have to invest a lot of money, which would drive rates up. But... we're still in compliance with the rule, the regional haze rule from the EPA, and ADEQ has proposed that."

"We're 100 percent behind it, we fully support it," Castleberry said of the new state haze plan.

At nearly 40 years, Castleberry says both White Bluff and Independence wouldn't be generating power long enough into the future to pay for the cost of sulfur dioxide scrubbers, roughly \$2 billion.

Glen Hooks with the Arkansas Sierra Club says it's reassuring that utility companies now have a bigger incentive to move toward cheaper, cleaner power sources like solar, where prices have fallen by almost half in the past five years.

"Even our state's biggest coal producers and coal burners — that's Entergy and the Arkansas Electric Cooperatives — are building solar farms in Arkansas on a utility scale," Hooks said. "They're importing hundreds of megawatts of wind from our neighbors, and they're starting to rely more and more on the fact that clean energy is affordable."

Hooks is disheartened, though, that coal will keep burning at both plants for the next ten years. Castleberry says Entergy will eventually decide the fate of the Independence plant.

The EPA is expected to approve Arkansas's final haze rule by early next year.

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http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/navajo-commission-hears-report-from-feds-about-abandoned-uranium-mines/article_5d0f5bed-5cd7-59e4-956e-76dcdb7ade91.html

Navajo commission hears report from feds about abandoned uranium mines

By Noel Lyn Smith | Farmington Daily Times Sep 28, 2018

SHIPROCK — Work continues across the Navajo Nation to study and reach conclusions about the impact of uranium mining and processing on tribal land.

The Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission received a report Thursday about ongoing work by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and inspect abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation.

In addition to evaluating the impact of those activities, the commission is charged with submitting recommendations for policies, laws and regulations to tribal leaders.

Approximately 30 million tons of uranium ore was mined on the reservation during the Cold War. The activity left 523 abandoned mines, according to the EPA.

Linda Reeves is a remedial project manager with the Tribal Lands Cleanup Section for the EPA Region 9. She provided an overview Thursday of work the agency is completing to address the 523 abandoned mines in six regions on the Navajo Nation.

During the last 10 years, the EPA has conducted initial screenings, which identifies contamination levels, for all the mines, and the agency has secured approximately \$1.7 billion to begin the cleanup process at 219 mines.

In collaboration with the Navajo Nation Superfund Program, more than 1,100 homes have been assessed for exposure levels to mine waste.

Fifty of the 1,100 homes were identified as posing risk to the individuals occupying the structures, and remediation work has been completed for each one, varying from the construction of new housing to providing financial compensation to residents.

Water contamination and quality remains an issue for some community members, and efforts to address that concern have led the EPA and the Indian Health Service to extend pipelines that deliver water to 3,800 homes.

The northern region of abandoned uranium mines consists of 121 mines found in the Cove, Lukachukai, Red Valley, Sweetwater and Teec Nos Pos chapters.

While there are no abandoned mines in Shiprock, there is a uranium mill and a transfer site where uranium ore was stored before delivery to the mill. The transfer site is one of the properties the EPA is investigating, Reeves said.

The EPA also supports projects started by Navajo Technical University and Diné College, she said.

Diné College received a \$429,467 grant from the agency to begin a study to examine the potential impact of abandoned uranium mines on livestock in Cove, Arizona.

In a Sept. 10 press release from the EPA, it was announced the tribal college will partner with Northern Arizona University and the University of New Mexico on the study and risk assessment.

Students and professors from the three institutions will assist EPA scientists with sampling for heavy metals and radioactive nuclides in livestock, including sheep, cattle and horses, the release states.

The federal and tribal personnel who attended Thursday's meeting also heard comments from community members about the impact of uranium mining on health and the environment.

Perry Charley, the northern regional representative on the commission, said the comments are important because those residents live with the aftermath of mining.

"We do require and look to you for full cleanup of the mess they left behind," Charley said.

Nona Baheshone, the commission's executive director, said the group's first meeting was in January, and at least one meeting has been conducted in each of the six abandoned uranium mining regions.



<https://www.chron.com/business/article/Texas-oil-companies-pump-more-than-17-million-13267260.php>

Texas oil companies pump more than \$17 million into fighting Washington carbon tax

Rye Druzin, Staff writer Updated 7:07 am CDT, Monday, October 1, 2018



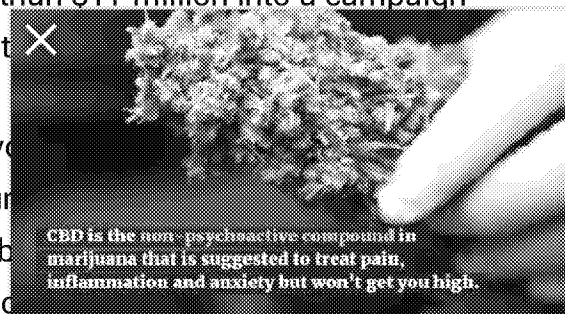
IMAGE 1 OF 22

FILE - This April 2, 2010 file photo shows a Tesoro Corp. refinery, including a gas flare flame that is part of normal plant operations, in Anacortes, Wash. A campaign bankrolled by the oil industry has raised \$20.46 million to defeat a carbon pollution fee on the ballot in Washington state aiming at tackling climate change.

Continue to see the most polluted cities according to the American Lung Association.

Texas oil companies have pumped more than \$17 million into a campaign opposing a carbon tax in Washington state.

The refiners Phillips 66 of Houston and Andeavor, a subsidiary of the British oil major BP, have poured \$16.3 million into the "1631" campaign, which seeks to defeat the carbon tax initiative. If passed, the initiative would create the first carbon tax in the United States.



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Those opposed to the initiative have raised more than \$20 million, according to state campaign finance records.

Those supporting Initiative 1631 have raised more than \$6.1 million, with The Nature Conservancy donating the largest amount at \$1 million.

Initiative 1631 would impose a fee of \$15 per metric ton of carbon on large emitters that would increase by \$2 each subsequent year and adjust for inflation. The fee would be imposed on fossil fuels sold or used within the state and electricity generated within or imported for consumption in Washington.

Supporters say the initiative would raise \$2.3 billion during the first five years, and the funds would be collected in a "clean up pollution fund" in the state treasury. Seventy percent of the funds would be used on clean air and energy investments, with another 25 percent used for clean water and healthy forest investment. The remainder would be spent on what the initiative calls "healthy communities investments."

RELATED: San Antonio refiner Andeavor fuels "obscene" campaign spending in Washington

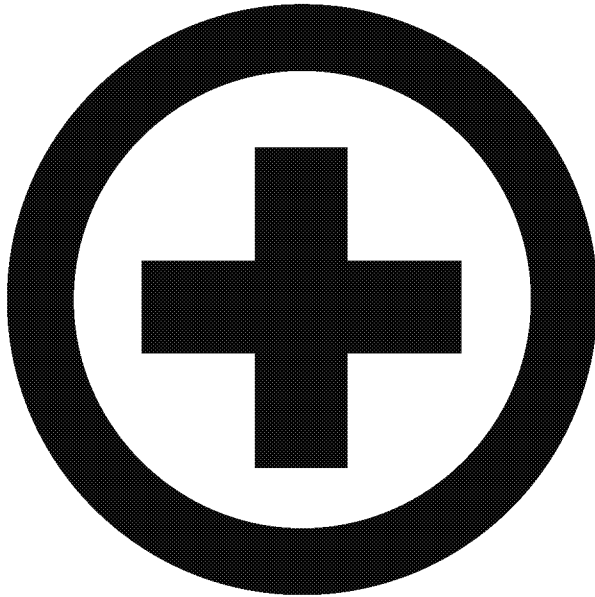
Other oil and gas companies that have spent money opposing the initiative include Chevron Corp., headquartered in San Ramon, Calif., the Dallas refiner HollyFrontier, and oil and gas industry group American Fuel, and Petrochemical Manufacturers.

Andeavor, which is being bought by Ohio-based Marathon Petroleum Corp., and another company spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in 2017 in a failed attempt to support a Vancouver, Wash. port commissioner. Andeavor and Savage Cos. had been attempting to develop a \$210 million crude oil-by-rail terminal in the Port of Vancouver, a project that was voted down by port commissioners in early 2018.

Environmental groups sue EPA to void approval of Oklahoma's coal waste program

Oklahoma was the first state to receive EPA approval to regulate coal ash, a toxic byproduct of power plants

Joe Wertz



Joe Wertz / StateImpact Oklahoma

Public Service Company of Oklahoma's Northeast
Station near Oologah, Okla.

Three environmental groups filed a federal lawsuit this week that accuses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of unlawfully approving Oklahoma's plan to manage waste from coal-fired power plants.

Oklahoma in June became the first state in the nation to get EPA approval to oversee the disposal of coal ash, a byproduct of power plants that contains toxic compounds like lead, mercury and arsenic.

Waterkeeper Alliance, Local Environmental Action Demanded Agency and Sierra Club filed the lawsuit Sept. 26 against the agency and acting administrator Andrew Wheeler, who became the nation's top environmental regulator when former Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt left the agency in July after months of controversy.

The environmental groups are asking a judge in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma to void the EPA's approval of the state coal ash program, which they say was developed without proper public input, unlawfully grants lifetime permits shielded from future health requirements and contains portions of federal regulations struck down and deemed too weak by a D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Environmental groups publicly opposed Oklahoma's effort take over regulation of coal ash at public hearings in February, arguing the plan protected utility companies from lawsuits and state agencies lacked the resources and rules to protect the environment and public health.

"Instead of implementing the law to protect the public, EPA and Oklahoma DEQ are openly trying to contort the law into a liability shield for industry," Kelly Hunter Foster, senior attorney with Waterkeeper Alliance, said in statement. "This is an attempt to preclude anyone injured by the pollution from taking action to protect themselves, turning the notions of rule of law and government in the public interest on their heads."

A spokesperson for the EPA declined to comment. A spokesperson for the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, which proposed and manages the state coal ash program, declined to comment.

Residents weigh in on state environmental regulators' waters proposal

Status of Buffalo a main concern

by Emily Walkenhorst | September 30, 2018 at 4:30 a.m.

2 COMMENTS   

0

State environmental regulators' draft list of impaired-water bodies doesn't provide justification for not listing certain waters and won't protect certain waters from continued pollution, dozens of people wrote to regulators this month.

Several others urged the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to remove some waters from the list, citing inadequate data and fears over the economic consequences of declaring those waters polluted.

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The bulk of the more than 460 public comments on the department's draft list concern the department's decision to list a portion of the Buffalo National River and a tributary, Big Creek, as impaired.

In July, the department declared that a 14.3-mile stretch of the Buffalo River and a 15-mile stretch of Big Creek were impaired because of E. coli. Another 3.7-mile stretch of Big Creek, just before it enters the Buffalo, is listed as impaired because of a lack of dissolved oxygen.

The portion of the Buffalo considered impaired runs above and below the confluence with Big Creek. The department said the source of impairment was unknown,

but it stated in other documents this month that C&H Hog Farms, near Big Creek, is a possible source.

The declarations are draft decisions. The department still must consider public comments, respond to each one and then make a final list. That list needs to be approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The lists are compiled every two years. Last summer the EPA approved for the first time Arkansas' lists dating back to 2010.

The most commented-on point of contention was that the state's listing of the Buffalo River and Big Creek exempts the waters from requiring new mandatory pollution-reducing activities. Instead of listing the waters under Category 5, which would have required new plans for pollution-reducing activities, the department listed the waters under Category 4b, which requires pollution-control activities through existing initiatives.

In this case, the department stated that the voluntary Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan and the non-regulatory Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee were sufficient for the 4b requirements, but many conservationists disagreed.

"Aspirational goals or unimplemented future plans do not qualify," attorney Ross Noland wrote on behalf of himself and the Arkansas Public Policy Panel.

A 2007 EPA examination of alternatives used by other states in Category 4b cases says that a water is Category 4b when a total maximum daily load study "is not needed because other pollution control requirements are expected to result in the attainment of an applicable water quality standard (WQS) in a reasonable period of time."

A total maximum daily load study is what is created under Category 5 to examine potential pollution-reducing activities.

A 2006 report from the EPA cited by some commenters outlines six elements for 4b listings, including a description of pollution control and a timeline on completing the elements. Commenters stated that the department's listing doesn't include a timeline for such controls.

In the department's explanation of its 4b listing, officials stated that stakeholders and action committee partners were needed to successfully implement strategy and develop milestones for the Buffalo River.

"ADEQ and [Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee] are committed to revising the strategy as necessary to achieve ultimate attainment of water-quality standards in the Buffalo River," the explanation reads.

The department will respond to comments at a later date.

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Colene Gaston, an attorney for the Beaver Water District, also noted that three parts of Beaver Lake were listed in Category 4b without accompanying regulatory actions.

The department also cited a watershed management plan in its listing of eight segments or tributaries of the Illinois River. Comments concerning the Illinois asked for regulatory requirements based off of a total maximum daily load study.

John Bailey, director of environmental and regulatory affairs for the Arkansas Farm Bureau, had other comments about the listings for the Buffalo River and Big Creek.

Big Creek should be broken into more segments, Bailey said, because of the concentration of E. coli exceedances farther upstream in the creek. The department should have used a geometric mean for

measuring E. coli, and much of the data used were collected by opponents of C&H Hog Farms who know how to game the system to get worse test results, Bailey said. All data showing dissolved oxygen impairment was from 2013, Bailey said, and it's unclear if the department has done any monitoring since then.

Others also criticized the source of some of the data, which the department has to vet to accept, and argued that reliable data do not actually show impairment.

Two Newton County leaders urged the department not to list any streams in the county at all.

"We are one of the poorest counties in the state and to hamper the ability of this counties [sic] citizens to make a living is going to further impoverish our county," wrote County Judge Warren Campbell, a relative of one of the C&H owners.

County Assessor Janet Lager echoed Campbell.

"Please consider the impact this would have on all farmers, property owners, cabin and kayak rentals, loggers, utilities, and county trash/maintenance departments," she wrote.

Other county residents and outsiders urged a higher-priority listing in a plea to improve the river and recreation there.

Alice Andrews, a frequent attendee of public meetings concerning C&H Hog Farms or the Buffalo River, called the department's listing a "Band-Aid" approach.

"Volunteer effort translates to a long wait before, or if, any significant project is born. Simply put, it's unrealistic," she said.

The listing is a way to avoid addressing C&H Hog Farms, wrote Gordon Watkins, president of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance. The watershed management plan is

not allowed to address regulated facilities such as C&H, he said.

The decision, Watkins said, "absolved ADEQ of responsibility for directly addressing a known threat to our state's most treasured stream, relying instead on private citizens and non-profit organizations to shoulder the burden while placing C&H off limits. This is unacceptable."

Dozens of comments also concerned Fourche Creek, a 20-mile-long waterway that cuts through Little Rock. The secluded creek is often loaded with trash from storm drains and dirt eroded from channelized portions of the creek.

Conservation groups have touted its potential for recreation for years, and state and local governments have tried to promote the creek, designating it as the state's first Urban Water Trail last year.

The department placed part of the creek on the list under Category 5, but commenters requested that priority for the creek within that category be raised from "low" to "high," given the level of pollution and the water's use as a recreational destination.

At the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission's meeting Friday, Dan Scheiman, bird conservation director at Audubon Arkansas, said the higher-priority designation would help his organization apply for funding to do a watershed management plan, which once created would help the organization apply for more funding to clean up the creek.

Several other comments stated that the department's list was insufficient because it did not list any waters as not meeting anti-degradation requirements.

Under anti-degradation, extraordinary resource waters, such as the Buffalo River, are not to degrade at all. Under the Clean Water Act, states are supposed to implement

plans for determining whether a proposed wastewater permit would contribute to nonpermissible degradation.

Arkansas is one of only two states without an EPA-approved anti-degradation implementation plan.

Many comments were related to the department's process for issuing the 303(d) list.

Gaston asked that the department post its supporting data and other documents online.

Ed Brocksmith, a founder of Save the Illinois River, also asked that the department explain why other tributaries were removed from previous lists.

Several commenters noted that explanations for delistings were lacking.

Others requested that the department draft the required integrated report for the public to examine during the comment period, as well.

https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/local/how-do-you-and-chicken-litter-affect-the-environment-a/article_0fcfded1-4c24-5bbe-a75d-22e00d6168ff.html

How do you (and chicken litter) affect the environment? A trip to Spring Creek gave students a real-life look

By Kelly Bostian Tulsa World Sep 29, 2018 Updated 11 hrs ago

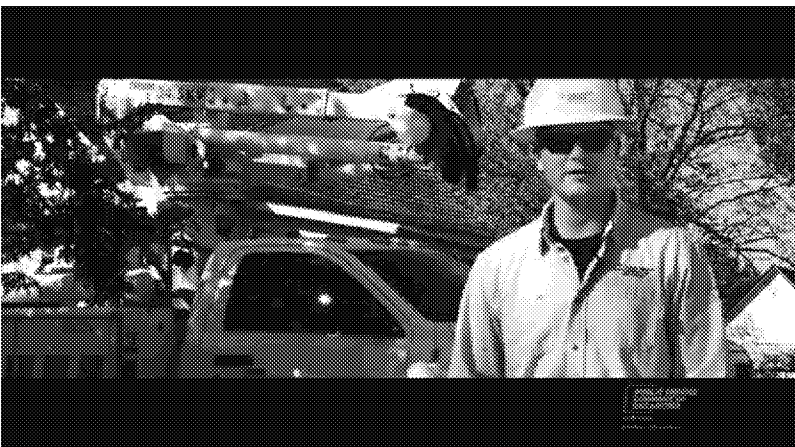


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Students of Oaks Mission School gather at Spring Creek as volunteer coordinator Cheryl Cheadle talks to them as part of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission Blue Thumb Education Program. KELLY BOSTIAN/Tulsa World

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Chicken waste and straw can harm the environment



Spring Creek education

Autoplay: On | Off

Students from schools in the center of counties where chicken farming is a growing concern had a closer look at their local clear-water stream this week, and Oklahoma Conservation Commission Blue Thumb Education Program staff and volunteers incorporated balance into those lessons—literally.

With a bag of pennies and a balancing scale, Blue Thumb Volunteer Coordinator Cheryl Cheadle walked 26 Oaks Mission School students from third to eighth grade through decision-making processes on a rainy Wednesday afternoon.

“We all like to eat chicken,” she said and added a penny to tip the scales one direction.

“We all want to drink clean water and have clean streams,” she said and added pennies to tip the scales the other way. “But everyone wants to have a job and people need to make money,” as the scales found balance the other direction.

It was just a small piece of a lesson that included a variety of balancing issues — whether to go to the movies or stay home and finish homework, for example — but drew a direct line between personal behaviors, everyday decisions and the environment. It all happened in a school setting along the banks

and in the waters of one of Oklahoma's most pristine streams.

"For the specific case of looking at chicken houses, I thought it could be effective because you can't come at a problem from only your angle," Cheadle said. "You have to pause it, and see where is everybody coming from."

"Instead of it being something that is us against them, it brings it into the place of a discussion."

In a session of a little over 90 minutes, students rotated through three stations at the Spencer family property, where Cheadle talked about watersheds, drainage and non-point-source pollution.

Blue Thumb educator Kim Shaw offered a closer look at the fish and crawdads, and educator Becky Zawalski introduced them to macro invertebrates that are sensitive to pollution, like the hellgrammite, water penny and "right-handed" snail (which breathes with gills) — all of which live in Spring Creek.

Cheadle's scales worked side by side with a watershed model she used to illustrate how every person can play a role in minimizing pollution by not littering or reading instructions carefully when using insecticides or fertilizers. She let students add elements to the model landscape — oil from cars, loose soil from gardening, litter, pesticides and fertilizers — and then added "rain" to the equation to wash those elements into the model's stream and lake.

"If we don't have a connection with nature it's easy to forget that we share the planet, and that's one of the things that we're able to do when we look at the bugs on the rocks and we look at the fish in the stream," Cheadle said.

About 45 students from nearby Peggs Public Schools enjoyed similar lessons on another part of the creek Thursday morning.

Blue Thumb is the education arm of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission Water Quality Division and is tasked with connecting citizens, youths and adult, with the natural world. It also directs a corps of volunteers who are monitoring more than 80 streams statewide, as well as monitoring wetlands, screening groundwater or helping with educational presentations.

Spring Creek has long been one of those monitored streams, and a group of landowners, volunteers and concerned citizens in the Spring Creek Coalition has been encouraging local schools to take advantage of Blue Thumb education offerings the past couple of years.

Coalition member Beth Rooney said the creek is an incredible “outdoor science lab” with Peggs, Lowrey, Oaks-Mission and Kansas schools right there in the watershed.

“In 2017, we partnered with Blue Thumb to bring Peggs seventh- and eighth-grade science students to the creek. It was an amazing experience all around, and the teachers told us they brought lessons learned back into the classroom,” she said. “Children are our future and key to the long-term protection of our creek. Especially with what is happening now with the proliferation of chicken houses in the Spring Creek watershed, it’s important that our youth understand the value of what they have in their backyard.”

Blue Thumb training offered

Blue Thumb training in Tulsa

Registration is open for two new volunteer (or refresher course) Blue Thumb training sessions set for Nov. 3 and 4 in Tulsa.

Training is 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. either day at the Westside Branch YMCA, 5400 S. Olympia Ave. Cost is \$15.

Training covers water testing information and what test results mean, and includes visiting a local creek to perform all of the required streamside procedures.

Registration is available at bluethumbok.com. For more information or to ask questions, send email bluethumb@conservation.ok.gov.

Staff Writer Kelly Bostian

Kelly Bostian writes about and photographs all things involving the environment, conservation, wildlife, and outdoors recreation. Phone: 918-581-8357

New Mexico Environment Department Awards APS Grant Funding For Early Replacement Of Five Buses

Submitted by Carol A. Clark on September 29, 2018 - 10:55am



NMED News:

ALBUQUERQUE — The Albuquerque Public School District has been awarded \$380,626.00 in grant funding from the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA).

The grant provides partial funding for the early replacement of five older, more polluting diesel-fueled school buses with five new gasoline-fueled school buses that meet the current EPA emissions standards for heavy-duty vehicles.

"These new school buses for the Albuquerque Public Schools will help protect the health of the children that ride the school buses daily and the residents and workers of the City of Albuquerque that are exposed to the harmful emissions generated by the older, dirtier school buses," said New Mexico Environment Department Cabinet Secretary Butch Tongate. "We are very pleased to have the opportunity to work with the Albuquerque Public Schools, reducing emissions generated by diesel-fueled vehicles, preserving air quality and enhancing the quality of life for the children that are exposed to the harmful emissions on a regular basis."

"Albuquerque Public Schools Student Transportation Services is committed to getting students to and from school as safely and efficiently as possible. The new school buses will help us achieve that mission by improving the air our students breath," APS Chief Operations Officer Scott Elder said. "We appreciate the New Mexico Environment Department for providing grant funding to APS that allowed us to replace five older buses with ones that meet current EPA emissions standards."

Older, more polluting school buses can lead to significant health risks for students, who typically ride these buses for 30 minutes up to two hours per day (in some rural locations). Children are more susceptible to air pollution than healthy adults because their respiratory systems are still developing, and they have faster breathing rates than adults. Asthma, a respiratory condition which affects 6.3 million American school children, is the most common long-term childhood disease in America.

Replacing older buses with newer, cleaner buses is a top priority for reducing children's exposure to diesel exhaust while also providing considerable safety improvements.

The State will receive additional DERA funding for the new federal fiscal year, Oct. 1, 2018 through Sept. 30, 2019. For additional information regarding the DERA funding and diesel emission reduction projects in the state, visit our [website](#) , or call us at 505.476.4300.

Meteorite, Satan ruled out, but fire in hole remains mystery for Arkansas town

by *Bill Bowden* | Today at 4:30 a.m.

3 COMMENTS   
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Meteorites, methane and the devil have been ruled out as the cause of a flaming hole in the ground at Midway.

Mickey Pendergrass, the county judge in Baxter County, said officials are still investigating the mysterious Midway hole that flared into a spectacular 12-foot flame early on the morning of Sept. 17, then burned at about 8 feet high for more than 40 minutes.

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"As far as the spiritual Satan goes, we've ruled that out," Pendergrass said. "He didn't come up and stick his pitchfork in the ground and blow that hole out."

Pendergrass said he had suspected methane, but investigators have found no source of it, such as decaying organic matter.

Pendergrass said the hole had been there for at least 10 years, according to a man who used to mow the grass on the private property along Arkansas 5. So it wasn't caused by the recent impact of a meteorite.

"It's kind of like an old groundhog hole, burrow, or armadillo's," he said. "But it's been there a long time."

The hole, he said, is about the size of a volleyball.

Jim Sierzchula, the Baxter County emergency management director, and geologists from the Arkansas Geological Survey investigated Sept. 21.

"They scoped the hole with a camera and determined it extended horizontal before intercepting a nearby drainage ditch about 10 feet away and 3 feet below the ground surface," according to a report from Ty Johnson and Danny Rains with the Geological Survey. "This was determined to be an animal hole."

Black Hills Energy also participated in the investigation.

"Although Black Hills Energy does not provide natural gas service in Midway, the local fire department contacted us to assist with their fire investigation," according to a statement from the company. "Our technicians responded and detected no natural gas in the area."

Pendergrass said there are no utility or fuel lines in the area that might have been leaking.

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality checked four underground fuel storage tanks in the area, two that are in use at Midway Citgo and Deli, and two that are capped and basically empty at Gearhead Garage.

"Based on ADEQ inspections it does not appear that any of these tanks contributed to the fire," according to a statement from the agency. "We can't speculate about other possible causes because we have not been trained to do investigations about such scenarios."

Donald Tucker, chief of the Midway Fire Protection District, said the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality also tested three above-ground gasoline tanks and two propane tanks, and determined that none of them were leaking.

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The fire was on private property in front of a billboard advertising Dr. Win Moore, a surgeon at Baxter Regional Medical Center's Bone & Joint Clinic in Mountain Home who said he has gotten a considerable amount of free publicity from the fire.

Pendergrass said the billboard wasn't damaged.

Initially, county officials were worried that a leak could cause other fires around Midway, which is 6 miles northwest of Mountain Home.

"We've kind of relieved our fears about it being a danger to the surrounding neighborhood," Pendergrass said.

He said it doesn't appear that anyone got photographs or video of the fire, which started about 4:30 a.m.

Tucker said he was too busy to take pictures.

"I was trying to keep everybody away from it," he said. "A deal like that, you don't know what's safe or what's not. I had a couple of firefighters who wanted to get up there and take a look at it too close."

Tucker said the flame was about 8 feet high when he arrived shortly after the fire started.

"It was burning red-orange color, about 2 feet in diameter," he said. "It came up about crotch high and spread out to that width."

Tucker said he initially thought it was a broken gas line, but that wasn't the case.

Just before the fire retreated into the hole, it shrunk to a flame about waist high for a few minutes, Tucker said.

"Then it just went down the hole and went out," he said.

"For a little bit, there was just a little bit of glow of fire down in the hole."

Tucker said the vent to the creek provided oxygen for the fire.

"The hole acted as a chimney," he said. "It was drawing air from a lower elevation. ... Whatever it was, it burned up its fuel and went out."

Pendergrass said someone could have set the fire on purpose.

"What kind of fuel did they use to make it so clean and no soot and no damage? And what was used to strike the fire to start with? There are just too many questions for it not to have been done on purpose, whether it was for fun or for giggles," Pendergrass said. "Somebody will talk someday and have to brag about it, and then we'll find out who did it."

Pendergrass said soil samples have been taken from the hole but have yet to be analyzed by a laboratory. Johnson, who works in the geohazards section of the Geological Survey, said soil may provide the clue.

"The soil samples should clear up any possibility of gasoline or anything else put down the hole or migrating groundwater contaminate such as gasoline," he said.

Tucker said it was an unusual morning Sept. 17.

"I've never seen it before. I hope I never see it again," he said. "What it was, I have no idea."



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Environment notebook

by Emily Walkenhorst | Today at 2:49 a.m.



COMMENTS

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Helena-West Helena receives \$3.5M loan

The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission this month approved about \$4 million in loans, about \$1.4 million in loans to be immediately forgiven and about \$285,000 in grants to water and wastewater utilities in Arkansas.

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Another 16 utilities received 10-year loans to replace water meters.

The commission also approved a \$43 million loan to Central Arkansas Water in September, previously reported by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

The biggest chunk of money -- \$3.5 million -- will go in the form of a loan to Helena-West Helena for energy efficiency improvements and the replacement of all customer water meters. The utility serves 4,591 customers.

The city of Fairfield Bay and the Frenchport Water Association in Ouachita County received the other two loans, of \$250,805 and \$206,000, respectively. Each entity has up to 10 years to pay off its loan at 2.75 percent interest rates. Fairfield Bay's loan will go toward emergency repairs related to flooding, and the Frenchport Water Association will do maintenance and repairs.

Omaha and Wright-Pastoria Water Association in Jefferson County will receive loans of \$850,000 and \$500,000, respectively, with principal forgiveness. Omaha will use the money to improve its drinking

water system, and the Wright-Pastoria Water Association will use its funds to replace water lines to prevent water loss.

United Water Associated in Monroe County received a \$154,500 grant to replace a failing water storage tank in its wastewater system. Fountain Hill in Ashley County will receive a grant of \$128,750 to improve its wastewater facilities.

Ten utilities -- Arkadelphia, Clinton, Crossett, Greenbrier, Nashville Rural Water PA, Tumbling Shoals PWA, Vilonia Waterworks Association, Washington Water Authority, Watson Chapel Water Associated and Wooster -- received 10-year loans totaling about \$11.1 million at a 0.5 percent interest rate to replace water meters.

Six utilities -- Cotter, Milltown Washburn PWA, The Mountain Top PWA, Palestine, Success and Watalula Water Users Association -- received more than \$600,000 in 10-year loans with waived fees to replace water and wastewater meters.

The commission also approved de-obligating \$111,535 in loans to Pulaski County government for now-completed energy efficiency projects and \$3,800.43 from Bradley for finished water system improvements.

Ozone regulations soon to be updated

The Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission has approved state environmental regulators' petition to change its ozone regulations to adopt a federal ozone standard change made in 2015.

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality petitioned the commission, which is its appellate and rule-making body, to start the rule-making process to include the stricter ozone standard in the state's air regulations.

In 2015, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lowered its limit for acceptable ozone levels from 75 parts of ozone per billion parts of air to 70 parts of ozone per billion parts of air.

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EPA does the science shuffle

By ANNIE SNIDER 09/28/2018 10:00 AM EDT

With help from Eric Wolff, Ben Lefebvre, Anthony Adragna and Darius Dixon.

SHUFFLING SCIENCE AT EPA: EPA leaders floated a reorganization plan to staff this week that would merge the agency's science adviser with another unit under the Office of Research and Development — a move that drew alarm from some agency staffers and outside observers who called it a major demotion for the position. The science adviser has historically had a direct line to the EPA administrator, with the charge of ensuring that the highest quality science is implemented consistently across the agency and in its regulatory decisions, and critics argue the new move would put layers of bureaucracy between the adviser and the agency's top decision maker. "There is a significant loss of independence here," said Michael Halpern, deputy director of the Center for Science and Democracy and the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Story Continued Below

But the agency's acting science adviser, Jennifer Orme-Zavaleta, said in a statement that the plan was developed by career leaders and was aimed at "reducing redundancies." She also pointed out that, in recent years, the science adviser post has actually been filled by the head of the office of research and development, under which it would now be housed — a dual role she herself plays — meaning the adviser could still have direct access to the administrator.

It's all in the messenger: Some career EPA staffers told ME they thought the organizational shuffle made some sense, and likely wouldn't have drawn scrutiny if it hadn't come after other controversial moves by the Trump administration on science, like seeking to limit the agency's ability to use research on the effects of pollution on human health, adding industry representatives to EPA's influential science advisory board, and just this week putting the head of the agency's Office of Children's Health Protection on administrative leave.

Trump administration sees 7-degree rise in global temperatures by 2100

Updated Sep 28;

Posted Sep 28



Firefighters from Brea, Calif., inspect and cut fireline on Aug. 1, 2018, as the Ranch Fire burns near Upper Lake, Calif. A day earlier, it and the River Fire totaled more than 74,000 acres. An increase in wildfires is just one potential effect of rising global temperatures, which the Trump administration says will rise by 7 degrees by the end of the 21st century.



(Photo for The Washington Post by Stuart W. Palley)

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By The Washington Post

WASHINGTON - Last month, deep in a 500-page environmental impact statement, the Trump administration made a startling assumption: On its current course, the planet will warm a disastrous 7 degrees by the end of this century.

A rise of 7 degrees Fahrenheit, or about 4 degrees Celsius, compared with pre-industrial levels would be catastrophic, according to scientists. Many coral reefs would dissolve in increasingly acidic oceans. Parts of Manhattan and Miami would be underwater without costly coastal defenses. Extreme heat waves would routinely smother large parts of the globe.

But the administration did not offer this dire forecast as part of an argument to combat climate change. Just the opposite: The analysis assumes the planet's fate is already sealed.

The draft statement, issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), was written to justify President Donald Trump's decision to freeze federal fuel efficiency standards for cars and light trucks built after 2020. While the proposal would increase greenhouse gas emissions, the impact statement says, that policy would add just a very small drop to a very big, hot bucket.



"The amazing thing they're saying is human activities are going to lead to this rise of carbon dioxide that is disastrous for the environment and society. And then they're saying they're not going to do anything about it," said Michael MacCracken, who served as a senior scientist at the U.S. Global Change Research Program from 1993 to 2002.

The document projects that global temperature will rise by nearly 3.5 degrees Celsius above the average temperature between 1986 and 2005 regardless of whether Obama-era tailpipe standards take effect or are frozen for six years, as the Trump administration has proposed. The global average temperature rose more than 0.5 degrees Celsius between 1880, the start of industrialization, and 1986, so the analysis assumes a roughly 4 degree Celsius or 7 degree Fahrenheit increase from preindustrial levels.

The world would have to make deep cuts in carbon emissions to avoid this drastic warming, the analysis states. And that "would require substantial increases in technology innovation and adoption compared to today's levels and would require the



economy and the vehicle fleet to move away from the use of fossil fuels, which is not currently technologically feasible or economically feasible."

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

World leaders have pledged to keep the world from warming more than 2 degrees Celsius compared with preindustrial levels, and agreed to try to keep the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. But the current greenhouse gas cuts pledged under the 2015 Paris climate agreement are not steep enough to meet either goal. Scientists predict a 4 degree Celsius rise by the century's end if countries take no meaningful actions to curb their carbon output.

Trump has vowed to exit the Paris accord and called climate change a hoax. In the past two months, the White House has pushed to dismantle nearly half a dozen major rules aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, deregulatory moves intended to save companies hundreds of millions of dollars.



If enacted, the administration's proposals would give new life to aging coal plants; allow oil and gas operations to release more methane into the atmosphere; and prevent new curbs on greenhouse gases used in refrigerators and air-conditioning units. The vehicle rule alone would put 8 billion additional tons of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere this century, more than a year's worth of total U.S. emissions, according to the government's own analysis.

Administration estimates acknowledge that the policies would release far more greenhouse gas emissions from America's energy and transportation sectors than otherwise would have been allowed.

David Pettit, a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council who testified against Trump's freeze of fuel efficiency standards this week in Fresno, Calif., said his organization is prepared to use the administration's own numbers to challenge their regulatory rollbacks. He noted that the NHTSA document projects that if the world takes no action to curb emissions, current atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide would rise from 410 parts per million to 789 ppm by 2100.



"I was shocked when I saw it," Pettit said in a phone interview. "These are their numbers. They aren't our numbers."

Conservatives who condemned Obama's climate initiatives as regulatory overreach have defended the Trump administration's approach, calling it a more reasonable course.

Obama's climate policies were costly to industry and yet "mostly symbolic," because they would have made barely a dent in global carbon dioxide emissions, said Heritage Foundation research fellow Nick Loris, adding: "Frivolous is a good way to describe it."

NHTSA commissioned ICF International Inc., a consulting firm based in Fairfax, Va., to help prepare the impact statement. An agency spokeswoman said the Environmental Protection Agency "and NHTSA welcome comments on all aspects of the environmental analysis" but declined to provide additional information about the agency's long-term temperature forecast.

Federal agencies typically do not include century-long climate projections in their environmental impact statements. Instead, they tend to assess a regulation's impact during the life of the program - the years a coal plant would run, for example, or the amount of time certain vehicles would be on the road.



Using the no-action scenario "is a textbook example of how to lie with statistics," said MIT Sloan School of Management professor John Sterman. "First, the administration proposes vehicle efficiency policies that would do almost nothing [to fight climate change]. Then [the administration] makes their impact seem even smaller by comparing their proposals to what would happen if the entire world does nothing."

This week, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned leaders gathered in New York, "If we do not change course in the next two years, we risk runaway climate change. . . . Our future is at stake."

Federal and independent research - including projections included in last month's analysis of the revised fuel-efficiency standards - echoes that theme. The environmental impact statement cites "evidence of climate-induced changes," such as more frequent droughts, floods, severe storms and heat waves, and estimates that seas could rise nearly three feet globally by 2100 if the world does not decrease its carbon output.

Two articles published in the journal Science since late July - both co-authored by federal scientists - predicted that the global landscape could be transformed "without major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions" and declared that soaring temperatures worldwide bore humans' "fingerprint."



"With this administration, it's almost as if this science is happening in another galaxy," said Rachel Cleetus, policy director and lead economist for the Union of Concerned Scientists' climate and energy program. "That feedback isn't informing the policy."

Administration officials say they take federal scientific findings into account when crafting energy policy - along with their interpretation of the law and President Trump's agenda. The EPA's acting administrator, Andrew Wheeler, has been among the Trump officials who have noted that U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants have fallen over time.

But the debate comes after a troubling summer of devastating wildfires, record-breaking heat and a catastrophic hurricane - each of which, federal scientists say, signals a warming world.

Some Democratic elected officials, such as Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, said Americans are starting to recognize these events as evidence of climate change. On Feb. 25, Inslee met privately with several Cabinet officials, including then-EPA chief Scott Pruitt, and Western state governors. Inslee accused them of engaging in "morally reprehensible" behavior



that threatened his children and grandchildren, according to four meeting participants, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details of the private conversation.

In an interview, Inslee said that the ash from wildfires that covered Washington residents' car hoods this summer, and the acrid smoke that filled their air, has made more voters of both parties grasp the real-world implications of climate change.

"There is anger in my state about the administration's failure to protect us," he said. "When you taste it on your tongue, it's a reality."

Story by Juliet Eilperin, The Washington Post.

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PREPARING FOR UNPRECEDENTED STORMS

By Chemical Engineering | October 1, 2018

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This year, hurricane season in the U.S. has been active again, with Hurricane Florence battering North Carolina and its surroundings last month. While wind speeds labeled it as a Category 1 hurricane at landfall, the enormous, slow-moving storm caused great damage, and tragically, loss of life. At the time of this writing, the event has been downgraded to a tropical storm, but the relentless rain and the storm-related tornadoes are continuing to wreak havoc in multiple states, even far inland from the original site of landfall.

FLOODING

Scenes of the record-setting, unprecedented flooding caused by Florence — homes, roads and vehicles submerged under water, and people and pets being rescued in boats — are reminiscent of the scenes we witnessed last year with the also unprecedented flooding from Hurricane Harvey in the Gulf Coast. Flooding can cause serious safety concerns and consequences for industrial facilities. At the time of this writing, for example, there are reports that Florence's heavy rain caused a collapse of a coal-ash landfill at a former coal-fired power plant (closed since 2013) in North Carolina. Concerns are that the coal ash could contaminate nearby waterways.

Last year, record-setting flooding from Hurricane Harvey caused failures of several safety systems at Arkema's Crosby, Texas plant that ultimately led to fires and explosions of temperature-sensitive organic peroxides when cooling capabilities were lost. Twenty-one people who were exposed to vapor from the decomposing peroxides on a nearby public highway sought medical attention, and more than 200 people were evacuated from within a 1.5-mile radius around the plant.

While safety systems were in place and safety plans were followed at the Crosby site, they were insufficient for the unprecedented extreme flooding that occurred. In its final report on this incident that was issued earlier this year,* the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB; www.csb.org) said that "other companies also might be unaware of the potential for flood risks to create process safety hazards at their facilities if flood-related information is not typically compiled or assessed in required safety analyses." And understanding flood-plain elevations and historical flooding events at facilities may be more important than ever. According to the CSB report, "In recent years, flooding from extreme rainfall events has increased and according to a 2015 EPA report, this trend is projected to continue..." The CSB report offers several recommendations, including the development of more comprehensive guidance for extreme weather events, which do appear to be happening more frequently.

ANOTHER PRECEDENT

Another unprecedented outcome from Hurricane Harvey is the indictment this August against Arkema's chief executive and the Crosby plant manager for the events that took place. The American Chemistry Council (ACC; www.americanchemistry.com) stated that this indictment "sets an alarming and unreasonable precedent of seeking to hold people responsible for acts of nature."

While the results of the legal actions have yet to unfold, the seemingly more-frequent extreme weather that is being experienced globally calls for a re-assessment of what can be done to better prepare for unprecedented events.

Dorothy Lozowski, Editorial Director



[*www.csb.gov/arkema-inc-chemical-plant-fire-/](http://www.csb.gov/arkema-inc-chemical-plant-fire-/)

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